

For the  
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
From  
Neil Albert Salonen  
President, University of Bridgeport  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges

March 9, 2010

Re: Raised Bill No. 136 (An Act concerning new and revised academic programs of nonprofit independent institutions of higher education.)

Thank you for the opportunity to appear here today in support of Raised Bill No. 136. I am here both as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges and as President of the University of Bridgeport. In both roles, a primary commitment of mine is to promote academic excellence and workforce readiness.

As the members of the committee are undoubtedly aware, the non-profit independent institutions of higher education are collectively the third largest employer in the state, and award approximately 50% of the degrees -- at a small fraction of the costs the state pays per degree at public institutions. Recent reports in the Chronicle of Higher Education underscore the dramatic increase in the percentage of enrolled students in the for-profit sector institutions, in large part because of their ability to respond swiftly to changing workforce needs. Our institutions have appreciated the professionalism and collegiality of the CTDHE staff, but that we support Raised Bill No. 136, which envisions eliminating the program licensure and program accreditation function of the CTDHE which we believe slows down our ability to adapt to changing needs by adding an extra step to the process, for little added value. Thirty-nine states do not have anything analogous to this process, we believe for the good reason that it

duplicates roles played by professional and regional accreditation agencies, four other states have a minimal process.

The University of Bridgeport recently submitted a program proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences, which prepares students to seek further professional training in the health sciences, and also prepares students for entry-level positions in the health sciences, including nutrition, exercise and fitness, environmental health and community health. We already have a strong undergraduate program in Biology, and strong graduate program in several of the health sciences, with highly qualified faculty in both programs. As Bureau of Labor statistics show, the health sciences fields are among the fastest growing employment segments of the economy. As part of our internal process, the University developed the proposal, received faculty input, engaged external consultants to come to campus, and sought and received approval of our Board of Trustees. As part of the CTDHE process, the University then circulated the proposed programs to the state's other universities and colleges and invited consultants to campus and included their input, before presenting the application for licensure to the CTDHE. After that, the University sent personnel to the Advisory Committee on Accreditation (ACA) and then also to the Board of Governors meeting. The ACA and Board of Governors approved the program for licensure, but each step added time and delayed enrollment of the first class. In our case, the Health Sciences program was developed for a first class in the Fall 2009, but we have only recently received licensure to enroll a class in Fall 2010. Our enrollment management team has indicated that the delay in approval will limit enrollment of the first class.

The Board of Governors also recently granted a license for the University to offer a Master of Science Physician Assistant program. Each of the steps described above was required to receive this license, but the MS-PA program must be professionally accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on

Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). The ARC-PA standards far exceed those required by the CT Regulations for Licensure and Accreditation of Institutions and Programs of Higher Learning. In the case of this program, steps taken to receive state licensure did not delay our enrollment of a first class, since that is tied to accreditation by ARC-PA, but candidly, the process added little to this program. When students are enrolled, we will need to maintain ongoing relations with ARC-PA, and also will need to apply for CTDHE program accreditation in order to graduate students from the program.

The University of Bridgeport has been growing quite quickly in recent years, and as a result we have added and modified a significant number of programs. Cumulatively, the sheer number of hours dedicated to seeking licensure and program accreditation, in addition to regional and professional accreditation, is significant, yet the unduplicated benefits are few.

The CTDHE accredits each of our institutions as a whole, a process that is carried out in coordination with our regional accreditor, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, New England Association of Schools and Colleges (CIHE-NEASC). At a time of constrained state resources, Raised Bill No. 136 would appear to offer one opportunity to streamline state functions and reduce duplication.

On behalf of all members of the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges, I want to assure you that our goal is to offer programs of the highest quality and to prepare highly qualified personnel to serve in the Connecticut, regional, and global workforce. We can understand there may be other issues with respect to public institutions and for-profit institutions, particularly those from out-of-state. We do not think those issues relate to the independent non-profits.